# THE FRONTIER

A CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON THE COMMON LIFE

EDITED BY
PHILIP MAIRET AND ALEC VIDLER

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OF RELIGION

JANUARY 1951
Vol. II No. 1

THE DEFENCE OF THE WEST
Henri de Tienda

CINEMA AND EVANGELIZATION IN FRANCE
Martin Jarrett-Kerr

A SAINT ON THE THRESHOLD

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*by John Baillie*

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THE
# FRONTIER
A CHRISTIAN COMMENTARY ON THE COMMON LIFE

Vol. II. No. 1. JANUARY 1951

## Monthly Letter

THE New Year dawns upon a world hushed with fears where it is not loud with strife. The extension of the war in the Far East, so disastrous in itself and for the greater menace it opens up elsewhere, is a challenge to the Western peoples that none of us are likely to underrate. But neither should we be intimidated. These are days of utterly incalculable portent. This time last year, to take a smaller instance, nearly all our learned heads were full of apprehensions, which turned out to be mistaken, for our national economy. Fears can prove as groundless as hopes, and we have seen that terror and triumph can be equally dangerous motives in action. In what follows, we shall say what we can of some deeper grounds for preserving quietness and confidence in what is surely the ugliest situation mankind has had to face. We do not mean the final resort of faith, the apocalyptic hope of a life beyond life. It is possible for that, too, to be a flight from reality, and here we are concerned with the fate or future of the societies that Christian faith and Christian communities have done so much to shape ; for whose preservation and renewal these same communities are required to work and pray, even as we are required to work and pray for the health and recovery of individual bodies as well as souls. Just before the alarming news of a month ago, a correspondent wrote urging us to write about what is called the " Defence of the West ".

He had been struck by the attitude of Protestant leaders in Western Germany towards this burning question. Niemöller and Heinemann, whom we must regard as pillars, had come out in sharp opposition to the re-arming of Western Germany. Karl Barth had made a trenchant statement to the same effect, which had no publicity in this country. The refusal of the Western Germans to contribute to their own defence—when their own Government has agreed, in principle, to make such a contribution—could wreck the plans being made by the Atlantic Union for the protection of Western Europe.

*The Dilemma of German Protestants*

We believe, however, that these statements are neither intended to sabotage the defence of Europe from the Eastern invaders, nor likely to do so. Nor do such views (though said to be spreading in the German public as a whole) represent more than a minority in German churches. But church leaders are bound by their position to think for their own communities—in this case for the German Evangelical Church, which exists in the Russian-controlled east as well as the west of Germany; it is now the only German national institution not split into two. The Communist Administration have not seriously interfered with it, but would certainly do so if it appeared to them to be a body avowedly or even tacitly in favour of Western re-armament. They would remove its leading officers and replace them, as they have done elsewhere, by officials who would turn the Eastern congregations into a separate Lutheran church. Apart from this, Niemöller and Heinemann sincerely agree with the majority of ordinary Germans in their objections to a revival of the German armed forces. And it is true that the economic condition of Germany makes any expenditure on military effort even more deplorable than elsewhere; that there is a moral absurdity in our demanding it of them when for five years we have been ostentatiously trying to cure them of militarism; true also that there is no way of

making absolutely certain that even a partial renewal of German military training will not play into the hands of a militarist German movement at some future date. All these objections are real, and yet outweighed by the far grimmer dangers of a refusal to co-operate with Western defence. But Dr. Barth, at least, does not seem entirely to exclude this co-operation: his seventh and last point[1] against German re-armament seems to allow of a "contribution" to defence, if it can be arranged under adequate safeguards. And that is what the three chief Atlantic Powers are trying to devise.

*The Cause is Peace*

These German church leaders are not doctrinaire pacifists; we know that from their records. They are lovers of peace and workers for international concord in the only ways open to them. They are not men to be taken in by the communist-inspired "peace" movement and its spurious emotional appeals. Probably not only they but most Germans know that the will to peace is on the side of the Western Powers and U.N.O. But in Germany, unfortunately, very few can believe peace is possible at all. One of the Germans' afflictions is a fatalistic conviction that the total struggle is coming, and that their poor but best hope is to be ciphers in it. After such profound moral and physical defeat, they are defeatist in outlook; and the real purpose of Western defence is a thing we have too little helped them to understand. Indeed it is doubtful whether many in Britain or America have a sufficiently firm grasp of the idea. When things go fairly well, we tend to put the problem out of mind, and whenever a set-back forces us back to realities, there is a drift to pessimism, to disbelief that the Western peoples can possibly achieve the unity, or mobilize the will and energy, to serve their cause. Not that we would or could surrender, but we half resign ourselves to the worst,

[1] See Interim, p. 13.

giving up hope and faith in peace. But this is a kind of capitulation, a flight from the real task into something which, though dark and desperate, is simpler and less of a mental strain. The task of the West is something new in history; for the Western Governments are not arming in the hope of "bargaining from strength" with an adversary or beating him in battle, but in order to obstruct his advance and keep him at bay, whilst carrying out urgent repairs and developments in their own domains. We cannot have peace in a world where the greatest military state is committed to moral and ideological aggression against every state that will not become its vassal. Nor can we afford war with modern weapons which would be suicidal even for the victorious state. The supreme and necessary aim of the West is to prevent the "cold war" from bursting into flames and consuming civilization.

*"Containment"*

Hence the policy, known as "Containment" of the Communist menace, which may be said to have first taken shape with the origin of the Marshall Plan. Like any other great human design it may miscarry; but since it was first evolved, only half consciously, in response to urgent specific dangers, this has been the subject of much expert research, has become established as the common policy of the Atlantic Powers, so far as they have one, and is believed to hold out reasonable hopes of success—provided certain conditions are fulfilled. One condition is the intelligent co-operation of at least a considerable proportion of the democratic peoples, upon whom it will make very considerable demands for a long while to come. Those who wish to understand this vast design and what it implies can hardly do better than read the very clear and concise report of a study group of Chatham House, called *Defence in the Cold War*.[1] From this comprehensive description of the circum-

[1] Published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 5s.

stances the policy of " Containment " emerges as in fact the only feasible cause open to the West. Another valuable study of this policy, developed at greater length and with hardly less mastery of the material is Miss Barbara Ward's *A Policy for the West*, which is to appear as a *Penguin* book this month. This explains the necessity not only for the policy, but for a far more conscious pursuit of it than has yet been shown ; it gives a reasoned estimate of the efforts and sacrifices it will require and some frank discussion of the dangers lurking in this way of escape from disaster.

*Russia's Policy*

The required collaboration, hard work and imperturbability of purpose, will hardly be forthcoming unless the democratic peoples believe the end will be attained. One present obstacle to this is the doubt, notably in Western Germany, whether any adequate strengthening of the forces actually stationed in that area may not provoke the same Communist reaction as we have seen in Korea—i.e., an attack by the Communist forces of the eastern half of the country, which would speedily draw support of the Red Army and precipitate the global war we seek to avert. There are strong reasons, however, according to nearly all the best informed opinion, for thinking that the Kremlin is not likely to commit its own armed forces to an attack, unless it feels certain it is being attacked. A strengthening of Western Europe that was sufficient to stabilize the situation would not be enough to threaten Russia. The policy of Russia is to keep the nations all around its frontier in a state of internal tension and political division that makes them weak, overawed by their immense neighbour. That kind of defence (a sort of political " scorched-earth " policy) is traditional, and goes back to the earlier history of the Byzantine Empire out of which the Czardom grew. It fits in well with the pseudo-Marxian prophecy, which controls every discussion between the Russian leaders, that the " capitalist " world will disintegrate by its own internal

tensions, and only collect itself for a last futile assault upon the Socialist portion of the world. The theory is that the one universal socialist bureaucracy will then enter into the whole wealth and heritage of scientific civilization: but even Marx sometimes foresaw another possibility—that such a conflict might destroy civilization altogether—" the conqueror and the conquered and the wreck of that for which they combated ". If the pundits of the Kremlin ever remember this, as in these days of atomic power they well may, it can only re-inforce their preference for the defensive policy which they have followed as recently as in the cases of Finland and Jugoslavia. With their moral aggression and political infiltration they will go on attacking every non-communist people around them " by all mischief short of war "; but they will not wage military war upon a sufficiently defended neighbour—except by proxy.

*Strains upon Endurance*

The question about the policy of containment is not whether it will provoke war, but whether the Western peoples will see the necessity for such an effort and persevere in it. The menace it is meant to meet is not merely temporary; this is a plan for a decade, or a generation, or even two, though the first few years will be the worst. It puts a strain upon us at various levels of our national lives, of which we will mention only three. The first is that of co-operation between the governments of the West. Success will depend primarily upon the degree of mutual aid, military, political and economic, of which the American and European governments prove capable. Every inch of progress in this direction means the giving-up of some previous advantage to gain another, as yet hypothetical; and to show how difficult this is, there is no need to recapitulate the history of the last five years. It has been a tough job. A cynic might well say that no effective step has been taken until yet another country has disappeared behind the iron curtain. That would be an exaggeration, however. The interdepen-

dence of the Western states has found fairly steadily increasing expression all the time, at the level of official conferences and in co-ordinated actions. The works have been oiled, it is true, by the American provision of Marshall Aid, but that in itself was the most astonishing assumption of responsibility by one nation for others that has ever been seen, and has stimulated many other acts of co-operation between them. Progress would seem to have been possible only because the nations were in process of recovery, and their peoples' well-being on the up-grade, whilst the immediate effect of entering whole-heartedly upon the new defence policy will be a lowering, to an at least noticeable extent, of standards of living throughout the democracies concerned. This brings us to the second point where strain will be experienced.

*Can We Afford Defence ?*

It is already clear that the rearmament reluctantly arranged between the Atlantic Powers will sensibly reduce the real income of their citizens ; which will tend, unless specially and expensively prevented, to reduce social welfare in some other countries dependent on them. Since communists and their fellow-travellers breed like germs in the body of a society that is getting poorer in food, clothing and housing, there is thus a risk that to arm against the disease without may increase the infection within. This argument has the most force in Western spheres of influence remote from Europe and the U.S.A. and nearer to Russia. It is the argument of those who say things have gone so far that we cannot afford rearmament so soon after the world war. However, since this means, in the circumstances, that the Western democracies cannot afford to go on existing, the objection must be overruled. As the Chatham House report says, people may mean different things by " affording" rearmament. If they are questioning whether the West has the resources for what is required, there is no doubt whatever—its resources are more than ample. If they are asking

whether the required defence is more important than other claims upon us, it depends upon what claims are involved. Certain kinds of Government expenditure, including most or all of those for the social services, would not suffer reduction, because to reduce them would release little if anything for active defence. Other cuts in expenditure are likely to be painful enough ; all that can be urged in consolation is that the measures required to keep the peace, costly as they must be, will take far less of the national output of Britain, America and other states than they had to expend for years in the recent war, which they did afford and from which, as we see, they could recover. The one thing we really cannot afford is the kind of war that will otherwise happen as " inevitably " as the communists suppose ; and it can be prevented only by this resolute containment.

*Moral Requirements*

But the final question about the feasibility of Containment, is whether the democratic peoples are prepared to shelve other aims, inhibit other desires, and persevere for an indefinite period. If their leadership is as intelligent as hitherto it has been, and their own morale resolute, what is required is well within their powers—at the cost, it is true, of some initial privation ; but thereafter it should be possible to resume progress in living standards at home, while at the same time keeping up those contributions to economic welfare in other countries which are an essential part of the policy. The whole cost has been expertly guessed at 15 per cent of each nation's total income, whereas the war effort of 1941–5 absorbed about 50 per cent—though this estimate presupposes the successful solution of several far-from-simple problems. It is presumably harder for people to remain united in aim and loyal to their leadership in this kind of cold war than in such wars as have been previously experienced. Some of the signs are encouraging. The way in which the people of the U.S.A. have adapted them-

selves and assumed the attitude of responsibility that the changed circumstances require is unprecedented, and responsible opinion in Britain and Europe has shown some equal adaptability within its own spheres. But a successful prosecution of the defence of the West also imposes moral requirements, by which we have not yet been fully tested. There will be temptations, when a certain degree of military strength is attained, to take the risk of using it. Some accentuation of tension, caused by a local pressure from the enemy, might arouse a wave of resentment and demands for a high-handed reaction. This is the greatest peril, for the absolute condition of success is a firmness unshakeable by passion and vindictiveness. It will be the more exacting because the way will be long and tedious. This danger might also arise early, from exasperations caused by the monetary inflation which economic prophets already seem to accept as an inevitable disadvantage of the great design—though one which it should not be too difficult to keep under control. Inflation puts a moral strain upon the public which is hard enough to endure in time of war, and more so as the condition of an effort to keep the peace. This is closely connected with a third temptation which, if people yield to it, can wreck the effort from within—and that is mutual distrust. The new financial techniques with which Governments would carry out the required measures presuppose that there will be continuity of policy, upon the part of the workers' organizations and also of the capitalists. These bodies will have to carry on according to their previous commitments, resisting temptations to suspect and blame one another; and the last few years have shown how difficult this can be. Both sides have resorted to "strikes", the workers by withholding work, and the owners of money by exporting capital, which they have done against all regulations to the contrary. Successful containment might be possible despite some of this, but not much. The free nations cannot combine and keep their freedom if they are disintegrating within.

*Challenge and Response*

It is often said that we are facing one of those "challenges" which, according to Professor Toynbee, come to each great civilization, when its survival depends on its ability to make an original response and alter its own way of life. To say this is at once to show that the world policy briefly outlined here is not enough. The division of mankind into two halves is a prospect nobody wants; to be forced to accentuate it is no vision to fire the morai imagination of men, and to the Christian consciousness it is abhorent, impossible to be admitted as the real cleavage between human beings. We can only endure it so long as we see it as a thing forced upon us, believe it is a phase that will be survived, and feel that we have a part to play in transcending it. From this point of view, the question is whether our resources of living faith are greater than those of our opposers. The politics of power is a sphere of action in which Christian initiative and service has normally almost the least direct influence. It depends upon the grace of God, and man's obedience in humbler duties, whether defence will prove worth while. But we have thought it well, at this dark change of the years, to take stock of the defensive position within which spiritual and social endeavour will have to operate. For nothing exonerates us from the part we must bear as citizens; we shall discharge it better, and be more free for other service, in proportion as we feel that there are reasons for going forward in confidence and with reasonable hopes. And upon our best information we think there are.

# INTERIM

**Barth on Re-arming Germany**

The statement of Dr. Karl Barth on German re-armament, which is mentioned in this Month's editorial Letter, ended with a list of "seven points" against the project. These contain the gist of his argument, and should be read in illustration of the Editors' observations. The following version is translated from that of the Paris weekly *Réforme*:—

(1) One cannot, for the third time, expect German youth to be the victims of war, for the youth of no country has been bled so white as the German has by the last two wars. I believe also that the German people's instinct of self-preservation would forbid their acceptance of the sacrifice.

(2) It is impossible to exhort the German people to re-arm when they all know that the war would be a civil war, a struggle of Germans against Germans.

(3) It seems to me immoral to try to persuade a people, by every possible argument and especially by political and Christian arguments, that their salvation lies in preparation for another war, when for the last five years one has been trying to make them eradicate the last traces of militarism, to the point of forbidding the children to have toy soldiers.

(4) It seems to me evident that the rearmament of western Germany would be a direct provocation to the U.S.S.R., just the spark required to blow up the powder magazine.

(5) I have no idea (and who has?) to what extent the western strategists intend seriously to defend Germany between the Elbe and the Rhine (the only purpose which, after all, would give any meaning to this re-militarization); whether the German army would be used as an expendable rearguard or would, finally, have to fight on the Pyrenees, abandoning the women and children in Germany.

(6) I think that what I have said before (in the article) about positive defence against Communism has, in Germany, a special significance. The problems of the refugees, of unemployment, of the balance of imports, of housing construction, of repatriated prisoners of war, are all so little resolved that communism could in the end attract the masses

despite their present repugnance against it, as a sponge sucks up water. Is it truly " realistic " to prepare for a war and dedicate to it all the energies, feeble as they are, of which there is so much need to repair the disasters of the last war? Speaking as a German, I would say *non possumus*—we are otherwise engaged for a long while to come.

(7) I ask, with hesitation, because I do not want to arouse further enmities in Germany, would it not be absurd to create a new German army as an alleged factor of security for Europe? History has sufficiently demonstrated that Germany very quickly and easily turns militaristic. I do not want to see such a force reappear in Europe's vital living-space (not that I would ignore its very real value as an element in a common defence and in view of the danger threatening western Germany from the east); for there are too many things that must be learned and forgotten, and as yet too little sign of either, for one to be able to think of a new German soldiery without alarm.

* * * *

**" Voluntary Euthanasia "**

The legislation of " voluntary euthanasia " was debated on November 28th, in the House of Lords, not for the first time. The discussion drew forth some excellent answers on the negative side, which anyone who feels any moral doubt about the matter may be recommended to read. Even better for that purpose, perhaps, would be the speech delivered in the same place in 1936 by Lord Horder, and published the following year in his book *Health and a Day*; but his contribution to the present debate was also an effective and distinguished pronouncement, and so was that of the Archbishop of York. The movement in favour of this profoundly retrograde step is probably not as large as might appear from the prominence of sentimental appeals to " mercy killing " in newspapers of a certain class. But its sponsorship by a certain number of doctors and ministers of religion (some of whom, one suspects, would themselves shrink from personally administering such a measure) is disquieting, and all too typical of the moral confusions of the day. As culture tends towards a materialistic view of life, physical pain tends to become the supreme, or even the only absolute, evil.[1] Paradoxically, the demand for leave to escape pain, even at the supreme cost, arises just when medical science is able to

[1] As James Hinton said, " When a majority of the population consider suffering to be a greater evil than sin, damnation has begun."

do more to relieve pain than ever before in human history. But the demand is reinforced by another tendency of materialist origin—the desire to make death less important, less prominent and significant.

* * * *

On a merely practical and hedonistic view of life there is of course everything to be said for putting certain people " out of their misery " and relieving others of the burden that they represent. Of those who adopt this simplified view for reasons of sentiment and compassion, probably not many give a thought to the developments to which it could so easily lead, and indeed most likely would lead, for the psychological effects of capitulation upon such an ultimate principle as this would " soften-up " the moral defences of society to an indefinite depth. Dr. Garbett was right to remind the Lords of what happened in Germany under the Nazi patronage of medical science : and so was Lord Haden Guest to protest, as a doctor, against the present suggestion as " dishonourable ". The traditional Christian insistence that human life is sacred—that a man's life is not his own, nor anyone else's to dispose of—this, it is true, is an unconditional, super-rational demand. Men may easily forget that without their recognition of some unconditional demands there can be no truly human, spiritual life. As Kierkegaard wrote :—

> " Let the race, let the individual, make the experiment of doing without the unconditional—it is a whirlpool and remains such. For a longer or shorter period it may seem otherwise ; it may seem like stability and security ; but at bottom it is and it remains a whirlpool. . . . Without relating himself to the unconditional man cannot, in the deepest sense, be said to ' live '."

* * * *

**The British Sunday**

Most people were probably surprised when the House of Commons, after a spirited debate, refused to sanction the Sunday opening of the " fun fair " which is to be a feature of next year's Festival of Britain. Comments in the London press—with some exceptions, notably the *Daily Telegraph*—had led one to expect the opposite verdict. Since the Parties laid down no party lines and everyone voted according to conscience, the very large majority of 255 suggests our M.P's as a whole retain a sound respect for the Sabbath, or at the least think that disrespect for it would disaffect many of their constituents. There

were signs, both in the debate and in public comment, of a more conventional motive. The proposed amusement park would not, in the words of one member, " give a fair picture of what British people did on Sundays." Certainly it would be a wildly false picture of what they used to do up to two or three generations ago, when the British Sunday was regarded with more astonishment than envy by nations who knew nothing of our Puritan history. Unfortunately, it is only Sunday mornings that are now much more noticeably distinct from the rest of the week in this country than elsewhere. What distinguishes them, moreover, is little but inactivity, save for the 4.5 per cent who go to church. In the latter hours nearly every kind of recreation is given free rein, including most of those that were to be provided at the Festival's side-show. Religious citizens are divided upon the question of special legislation for Sundays in a secular society. We think, however, that this decision of Parliament was the decent and right one, partly illogical and conventional as it may have been.

* * * *

**Our Correspondents**

The Editors are most grateful for the number of letters received from readers since the last issue of *The Frontier*. This " background " correspondence is as encouraging as it is critical, and if readers will only keep it up we believe it will make a progressive difference and improvement in the service the journal can render. Some letters contain good suggestions for topics that could usefully be discussed in *The Frontier*, which the Editors shall try to act upon. One correspondent takes the trouble to add up and classify last year's contributions, pointing out that the proportion of sociological, political and economic items seems excessive, compared with the space given to other topics equally important for a journal seeking " a clearer understanding of contemporary tasks and problems in the light of the Christian faith ". There is justice in this observation, some sectors of the frontier, such as the arts and sciences, have had comparatively little attention: and during the coming year an effort shall be made, so far as resources permit, to restore the balance.

* * * *

**The Next Frontier Luncheon**

The next *Frontier* Luncheon will be held on Wednesday, February 21st, and the speaker will be Dr. J. H. Oldham. Further information and a form of application for tickets will be included in the next issue.

# CINEMA AND EVANGELIZATION IN FRANCE

*In last April's* Frontier *we noticed the work of* Sercinev *in France, as one of the most interesting of attempts to use the cinema in evangelistic work. Shortly after, we met Monsieur Henri de Tienda, the moving spirit of this enterprise, and he promised to write the special article, introducing the* Sercinev *method to English readers, of which the following is a translation.*

HOW do we know what methods of evangelization are the most effective? How many proselytes have been brought into the church in consequence of those fully orchestrated appeals conducted by what might be called the "demagogues of evangelization"? How many others have found salvation through the individual witness of ordinary members and by contact with them in day-to-day existence? Correct statistics might provide an eloquent answer. For our part, we remain convinced that the number of "Christians" eager to communicate eternal life to their fellows is too limited for their exiguous gains to counteract the losses reported from so many frontiers of the Faith elsewhere. Is this to say that the Word of God is not enough to convince the man of this mid-century?

In our opinion, the trouble is that Christians in general, and their orators especially, no longer know how to speak to the people of France in their daily language. This may be the result of a kind of professional jargon. The regular preachers, including the "demagogues of evangelization", are the victim of a pious vocabulary into which the traditional message has run and set. Between the populace and the Church, therefore, the gulf widens to a more and more alarming extent. Christians need not only to give up the vocabulary employed in the midst of the congregation. They need to re-think the Gospel in application to the mentality of the man in the street, putting themselves in his place and expounding the message from his point of view. This point of view, however, is that of men completely

de-christianized—indeed "heathen" in the precise Scriptural sense of that word, namely, that of men who are living wholly without the spiritual pre-occupations which are the basis of the Gospel appeal. The modern atheist has lost the sense of anything other than the material; and when Christians try to evangelize him he does not even see what they are talking about. He may not be unwilling to listen: but he fails to hear, because they are speaking of things that awaken no echo within him: the nerve of the spirit is dead.

The first requirement, then, is to discover what in the contemporary world will give us an approach to the modern man from the spiritual point of view. We must use our ingenuity if we are to translate the substance of the classic formulae into his desanctified terms. Employing the universally-known realities of our time as the vehicles for Christian teachings, the Gospel can still be brought within the grasp of our fellow citizens as they are. Now, amongst possible means to this end, the one that is unrivalled in its power to influence the heart, the soul and the mind of modern man is the cinematograph. In principle the film, which depicts life and formulates thought in moving images, constitutes indeed an effective international and social language. The least educated man can grasp the message of a film, even though he does not understand the language spoken in it; and if the dialogue also comes within his range the influence of a film may deflect all his future conduct. Those who draw profit from the moral or physical corruptions of their kind know this very well: to be "commercial", a film has to flatter the lower instincts of the spectators. The film is an agent of the moral and mental decadence of humanity: equally, therefore, we should be able to employ it for cultural edification. The Church ought moreover to try to use the screen for the proclamation of the Gospel.

But here we come up against some great difficulties.

If we are to preach the Gospel by means of the film, must we turn to "Biblical films" directly inspired by Holy

# Selected for Lent reading

## Church Strategy in a Changing World

BISHOP OF SHEFFIELD

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*and for Easter 1951*

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Scripture, and reproduce on the screen the essential situations of the Gospel story, embellished from all the resources of scenic magnificence and of archaeological reconstruction of which art and science are capable to-day? Or should we illustrate the leading themes of the Bible by means of "religious films" of which the plots and settings are borrowed from the modern world?

In view of the mentality of our fellow citizens, it is doubtful whether "Biblical films", even outstanding ones, bring to the public such actual and living witness as is needed. In all probability these pictures have the effects of a magnificent retrospect, but without producing the required shock. The average spectator does not feel himself called in question by the events that they present: he remains passive or neutral, and what is needed is that he should feel constrained to take sides. Admittedly, Christians who witness such films will be affected more intensely than they have ever been, perhaps, by the reading of the sacred texts. The children of our Sunday schools also will have the feeling that the instruction received is not just a "story", more or less tedious or marvellous as the case may be. But non-Christians will remain undisturbed. All the evangelistic fervour that has gone into the production of these films in the end goes unrewarded. And what is surprising in that? Such pictures are not produced after a full and sufficient effort to think the Biblical message again in relation to the norms of the modern mind. The thought of each epoch has its own canons, which it is futile not to take account of in any attempt to influence the individual.

"Religious films" dealing with the modern world render much better spiritual service. In witnessing them the spectator has at least the feeling that the action is proceeding in a universe related to his own. The public thus receives the impact of the film in a much more responsive mood, and it is not too much to expect positive results sooner or later. But since these films explicitly attempt religious instruction, there is a risk that the general public—that of the com-

mercial cinemas—may feel sold, if not irritated. A case in point was the projection of the Swedish film *Ordet* (in French *La Parole*) in a suburb of Paris. Only a few minutes after the projection had begun, the public began to show bad temper; and this went on *crescendo* to the point of noisy hostility. At the end of the film there remained no more than a handful of Christians, most of them Protestants, out of the audience of three hundred that had entered the hall. The public had a sense of having been duped or " sold ", so that our witness was wide of the mark ! This instance is all the worthier to be remembered since the film *Monsieur Vincent* continues to be shown with extraordinary success. Why is the reaction to this so very different ? No doubt because *Ordet* sets out from the beginning upon a spiritual level, whereas *Monsieur Vincent* depicts the Faith in deeds—and what deeds !—upon the social plane. Other religious films, the action of which is situated in our own times, such as *How Green was my Valley* have achieved unquestionable success : but this last is not so much a presentation of spiritual problems as a demonstration of the repercussions of the faith upon day-to-day existence. That is why it interests the public, and is also of service to the cause of evangelization.

These experiences are highly instructive. They suggest, at bottom, that modern man is turning away from Christianity because Christian action is proving itself too ineffective. As soon as Christians such as Monsieur Vincent come to embody the results of their faith in the conduct of the common life, contemporary man does not refuse his assent —quite the reverse. Far from suggesting that the people of France are hostile to the Gospel, as is often argued and as they themselves sometimes suppose, the Cinema shows that they are disposed to accept it, if only those who profess it bring proof that the Word of God is the one power in the world capable of changing the hearts and the conduct of men.

We need, therefore, many more films of the moral value and technical quality of *Monsieur Vincent* and *How Green*

*was my Valley*—to mention only these two, both of world-wide reputation.

Unfortunately, films of this class and quality are rare. How is their number to be increased? Should we produce some ourselves? For a long time we considered this possibility: there is no lack of producers, of actors nor of scenario writers, but only of the huge sums of money necessary to produce films of that calibre. Doubtless it would be possible to turn out some "shorts" less expensively; but the production cost of full-length films, capable of drawing crowds all over the world, has to be reckoned in hundreds of thousands.

One day, perhaps, we may rise to this; one ought never to despair of anything. But meanwhile we have to act; and can only avail ourselves of such programmes as the commercial distributors supply. And how are we to adapt the "commercial film" to a spiritual purpose?

Here, we suggest, is a call for the exercise of Christian wisdom. There are films quite devoid of doctrinal content which nevertheless depict, on the secular plane, events transparent to the Christian mind. These usually furnish grounds enough upon which to address the public, after their showing, in definitely religious terms, in the course of discussions similar to those held during the meetings of cinema clubs. In this way the film provides the point of departure for a missionary discourse, or at the least for an act of witness before the public. Experience has shown that this method can meet a public need, and bear fruit. By its means several young couples have already been rejoined to the Church, have had their children baptized, have asked for their union to be consecrated by religious marriage and have joined actively in the life of our communities. This is no more than a beginning, but it justifies us in advocating the method as an effective instrument of the faith.

To enable the audience to follow the film in such a way that they can afterwards join successfully in discussing it, it is advisable to direct their attention to a few questions,

carefully prepared in advance, about the meaning of the film, and what consequences of a spiritual kind it suggests. To draw up such questions one must, obviously, understand the film absolutely, know the dialogue almost by heart and, on the other side, be able to manoeuvre with facility in the biblical universe. Otherwise the questions will miscarry. To use the film in an evangelistic effort requires, then, some accurate knowledge of a purely technical kind, and great versatility in the spiritual sphere. It is hardly less useful to be accustomed to controversial debate, not to be easily disarmed in the course of discussion. But what is most difficult of all is to induce the public to stay for the quarter of an hour or twenty minutes after the picture for the discussion. That is why they must be told that the projection will be followed by an informal exchange of views about the film. In doing this, one takes the opportunity to state the questions prepared for the discussion.

We are well aware that such a procedure may appear revolutionary in some respects, and are not at all surprised if it meets with some obstinate opposition among Christians.

Nevertheless, the reception that we find in non-Christian quarters is such that we are persuaded to exploit our method to the utmost. In these two years many doors have been opened to us—in barracks, in hospitals and sanatoria, in prisons and convict settlements and in houses of correction, which would all have been closed to regular mission meetings. Such meetings are moreover excluded, in official institutions, by the laws concerning religious neutrality. Chaplains are authorized to visit their co-religionists, but no common action is permitted. By this gambit of the cinema, it has proved possible to do what was otherwise impossible, and the influence of the Gospel has been brought, in an unexpected way, to bear upon thousands of individuals who would never have consented to take part in any other religious manifestation. It is needless to insist upon the urgency of the appeal to such a work.

This is all the greater, since a growing number of French pastors support us in our endeavour, having realized how much it can help them in their ministry. When we began this activity many pastors regarded it as a side-issue. Their point of view seems to have shifted a good deal, especially during recent months.

Here are some of the Biblical themes attempted, and the pictures used in illustration of them :—

(1) *Divine love is stronger than all else.* (Diable au corps, Dieu est mort, Dernière chance, Premier de cordée, Sublime sacrifice, etc.)

(2) *Man's deep need to change his life.* (le Bienfaiteur, l'Idiot, le Puritain, Vous ne l'emporterez pas avec vous.)

(3) *The part Christians should play in the world.* (Dernière chance, L'homme à homme, Monsieur Vincent, Grapes of Wrath, How Green was my Valley.)

(4) *Christ, the head of the Church.* Dernière chance, Premier de Cordeé)

(5) *God or Mammon.* (Dernière chance, Grapes of Wrath, Sublime Sacrifice, Trésor de la Sierra Madra.)

(6) *Enemies of God, especially false Christians.* (The Bishop's Wife, le Puritain, Sublime sacrifice, Symphonic Pastorale).

(7) *Man does not live by bread alone.* (How Green was my Valley, Grapes of Wrath, Sciuscia, Trésor de la Sierra Madre.)

(8) *Spiritual life an incessant combat.* (Dernière chance, Dieu est mort, Monsieur Vincent, Premier de cordée, Sublime sacrifice (Pastor Hall).

(9) *Spiritual life, conversion.* (le Bienfaiteur, l'Idiot, Vous ne l'emporterez pas avec vous.)

These titles among many others show the uses that one can make of films, most of which are not religious but which, from various aspects, not only offer starting points for discussion upon subjects of supreme importance, but also illustrate in a modern manner some essential elements of the Gospel truth. Obviously, what it is allowable to say to the public is but little compared with what is required in order to understand and grasp the Faith. But it is enough,

as a rule, to arouse an intense interest in the audience; from one session to another this interest grows, and it is not uncommon for the public to respond to our appeal with unexpected alacrity. For instance, at a sanatorium in the neighbourhood of Paris, a hundred tracts, thirty new testaments and many other pamphlets were taken away by the audience at the end of the second performance: we were left in amazement! Admittedly the public does not make such rapid progress everywhere: But this incident is the more worthy of note since it occurred in an audience entirely military. Tangible results are normally rare before the fifth or sixth performance. Once a young man of twenty was entirely overcome, and immediately addressed himself to the pastor to receive regular religious instruction. But it would be misleading to generalize. Some specialists in evangelism reproach us with not being explicit enough in our colloquies with the public; with hardly skimming the surface of the issues raised; with saying the minimum, or even, sometimes, giving no explanation but resting content with mere allusions. But we expressly restrict ourselves to these broad outlines, rather than frighten the non-Christians away; we try to make them come back for more. This is what we call "evangelization in homœopathic doses". We set out from the fact of experience that we are concerned with citizens who, as we remarked above, are in one respect invalids: their sense of the spiritual life is atrophied almost to extinction. We must first try to bring it back to life by such appropriate medicaments as it can stand; hence our method of instruction by very small doses. Up to the present we have seen nothing to regret in this procedure. Wherever we have gone we have been invited to come again; and it is doubtful, to say the least, whether this would have happened had we belaboured the brains of the audiences with even a stroke or two of the evangelical bludgeon.

True to this principle, we have not scrupled to throw out more ballast still, when carrying our work into certain Government establishments, and into cinema clubs whose

members are mostly laymen. To avoid being branded as proselytisers—which might well bring an abrupt conclusion to all our efforts—we gave up trying to work upon the level of even qualified evangelization; we retreated into the neutral territory of the educational cinema. On this basis we founded, last July, an association of cinema clubs independent of any ecclesiastical organization—the *Fédération Film et Vie*. The objective of this is the study of Life in all its aspects including the spiritual and religious, under the label of "popular education by the cinema". Cinematograph groups established with military units, legal institutions, hospitals, etc. can join this without fear of being exposed to the slightest confessional pressure. Naturally, the *ciné-clubs* which came into being in consequence of our efforts in SERCINEV (*SERvice CINematographique d'EVangelisation*) are the most welcome members; but every cinema club carries on its activities just as it thinks fit. This elastic organization enables us to reach, directly or indirectly, an unlimited number of spectators: and this, in our view, is an essential aim to pursue, if we are to make contact with the mass of our people and to be able to discuss their most various problems in full liberty and in the spirit of the Gospel.

There are, no doubt, other federations of cinema clubs which might lay claim to the same breadth of view. But of these, some are definitely political and propagandist or attached to a particular religious community, whilst others are organizations of the State, under the influence of more or less occult groups. *Film et Vie* is therefore called upon to fill a considerable void; and the favourable reception it has had augurs well for its future.

A word in conclusion about finance.

Without going into details, it is clear that Sercinev is not in a position to achieve full self-support, at least not for the present nor, it would appear, for a considerable time to come.

Why is this? There are several reasons.

First of all, our co-religionists are used to getting everything from their churches free. All "good Protestants" pay, of course, certain dues to their parish. But as a rule this contribution falls far short of the real needs of the church. Only a minority really shoulder the general expenses and "bleed themselves white". At least three-quarters of the faithful regard themselves as not in the least indebted to the confessional organization they belong to, whose services they have always been accustomed to accept at their brethren's expense. When, therefore, a Protestant parish organizes an evangelistic campaign, in the course of which our members, or our Paris team, provide cinema projections, very few seem to feel called upon to support such an effort by their donations.

Moreover, to put on a show of this description, one has first to fulfil a number of pretty expensive conditions. First of all, there is the cost of hiring the films from the distributing agents in Paris or the provinces. We are always begging commercial agencies to grant us contracts at a preferential rate, and have succeeded in obtaining some films of the highest quality, such as those listed above, upon favoured terms. Even so, the estimate for a single performance is beyond the means of most of our parishes. To get over this difficulty we organize, wherever we can, a circuit of eight, ten or fifteen projections in different neighbourhoods of the same region. This greatly reduces the cost in each. But only specialists, equipped with adequate apparatus for the smaller 16 mm. films, are competent to carry out such plans.

An obvious solution would be to amass a library of films big enough to meet the needs of our supporters. But this would presuppose, first, that we had funds to buy copies of these films as well as the rights of showing them; and, secondly, that the films which interest us were for sale; and while it is possible, from time to time, to buy short pieces, full-length films are seldom available. It is true that, when the original commercial contracts come to an

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end, there are excellent opportunities for getting renewals of them on advantageous terms; but, for this, we lack sufficient credit. Indeed we have only existed, up to the present, thanks to the gifts of the Ecumenical Council: which, generous though they are, would not justify us in committing ourselves to such expenses.

We have therefore to try to improve the financial education of our co-religionists in order to cover our expenses as soon as may be. The costs are considerable, even though we strive to reduce them to the minimum. For two or three years to come, it is to be feared, we shall have to depend upon subsidies from outside. Possibly the Protestant Federation of France will one day feel itself in a position to assist us, but the slenderness of its means justifies no large hopes in that quarter. Until we have a really important mass of supporters, we shall probably continue to be dependent upon the generosity of friends who understand. The size of our public is growing beyond all our hopes. But to assure it of our services, we must be able to extend them.

Still, we are not losing heart. From various quarters we receive encouragement of the highest value; above all, we get more calls for our service than we can easily answer. We are convinced that money will come, somehow, as fast as it is needed, not only to maintain our present activity but to increase it. We give heartfelt thanks in advance, to all whom our Saviour will prompt to come to our aid. When we consider how we began with nothing, and then look at our present situation, we have good cause to trust in God's infallible faithfulness to his promises. For the rest, we say, in the words of a great statesman who was also a great Christian, "It is not necessary to hope in order to undertake, nor to succeed in order to persevere". The results obtained since the first of January 1950, and the needs of our people, are enough to persuade us that there is still plenty of work for us to do.

HENRI DE TIENDA,
General Secretary of Sercinev,
47 Rue de Clichy, Paris.

# A SAINT ON THE THRESHOLD

ON August 24th, 1943, a young Frenchwoman of Jewish descent died in a sanatorium at Ashford, Kent. She was only thirty-four, and was quite unknown to the general public. She had published nothing —unless one can count some articles on Homer in the *Cahiers du Sud*, and they appeared under the pen-name of " Émile Novis ". But since her death four books of her works have appeared in France,[1] one of them, *L'Enracinement*, in an ordered form, the rest stray papers, letters and jottings in note-books collected by devoted friends. And already there is said to be quite a cult of her, especially in the South of France—some say, almost a new " Catharist movement ". Who was this remarkable young lady ?

## I

Simone Weil was born in 1909, of Jewish parents, and brought up without any religious contacts whatsoever. " I was brought up," she says in a letter to Père Perrin (who edited her letters in *Attente de Dieu*), " by my parents and my brother " (who, by the way, was a brilliant mathematician) " in complete agnosticism ; and I have never made the least effort to get out of it, I've not even had the least desire to do so—and rightly, in my opinion ". (*A. de D.*, p. 101.) Even when quite a child in the 1914–18 War she began to feel for the lot of the prisoners and the poor, and used to refuse her sugar ration in order to give it away. She studied philosophy as a student, first under Le Senne, and then under Alain. She became a lecturer in philosophy, and also a member of the extreme Left ; although she was never primarily interested in politics. (For instance, she wanted in 1942 to get to Russia, not because she admired Communism—she loathed

[1] *La Pesanteur et la Grace* (ed. Gustave Thibon), 1948 (Plon) ; *L'Enracinement*, 1949 (Gallimard : Collection, " Espoir ") ; *Attente de Dieu*, 1950 (ed. J. M. Perrin, O.P.) (Colombe) ; *La Connaissance Surnaturelle*, 1950 (Gallimard).

it—but because the Russians were coming under the heel of the Nazi invasion.) She was always quite fearless, tactless and outspoken; an educational Inspector threatened her that she might be dismissed her post, and she replied "Mr. Inspector, I have always considered that dismissal would be the normal crowning of my career." She soon developed an uneasy conscience about her comfortable academic work, and volunteered to go to Spain with the Republicans during the Spanish war. There she unfortunately had an accident, injured her feet, and had to be brought back. Even while she was teaching she insisted on living on the equivalent of the "dole". Then she decided to throw in her lot with the industrial workers; in 1934 she worked in Renault works—and it was there, she says, she first really learned suffering. "Being in a factory, confounded in my own eyes and in everyone else's with the anonymous mass, the unhappiness of others entered into my flesh and my soul. . . . What I suffered there has marked me in such a lasting way that even to-day, when a human being, whoever it is, in any circumstances whatever, speaks to me without brutality, I can't prevent myself having the feeling that there must be some mistake and that the mistake will unfortunately be dissipated. I received there for ever the brand of slavery, like the brand of red-hot iron which the Romans put on their most despised slaves. Since then I have always regarded myself as a slave." (*A. de D.*, p. 74–5.)

After the fall of France the German-Petainist anti-semite legislation caused her to leave the University, and her parents moved to Marseilles. She herself went to work on the land, and it was then that she first met Père Perrin, who became her closest friend. He was the first and only priest she ever knew. He introduced her soon after to that fine Christian layman, philosopher and farmer, Gustave Thibon, who took her to work on his farm. She soon disliked the comfort and moved to a disused and ruined farm in order to share the life of the agricultural proletariat. She worked with the vine-dressers, and in spite of her delicate health (since a

small child she had had constant headaches, and an attack of pleurisy left her permanently weak) she insisted on working a full day—although sometimes she admits that her headaches made her work as if she was moving about in a nightmare. Finally she reluctantly left France in 1942 with her parents for the United States—hoping that she might thus be able to get to Russia or England. She came to London that November, and at once tried to get enrolled in the *Resistance*. She worked with M. Maurice Schumann's movement, and wanted to get sent on a mission to France, but her Jewish features would have been impossible to disguise. Finally she was taken ill. It was then found that she had been insisting on living on the equivalent of French rations in England. She was admitted to hospital, suffering from under-nourishment and T.B., and died the following August.

What astonished those who knew her was her spiritual maturity. Her knowledge was, for her age, quite remarkably wide—Hindu and Taoist texts, the Upanishads, Homer, the Greek tragedians, Plato (whom she regarded as a genuine precursor to Christianity), and so on. But she was not interested in them merely for scholarship's sake: and increasingly it was her passion to see Christians taking all that these writers have to teach and including them all within the scope of the Incarnation. In 1940 she first realized, in reading the *Bhagavad-Gita*, that "we owe to religious truth something quite other than the adherence we give to a beautiful poem—we owe a quite categorical adherence of a totally different sort." (*A. de D.*, p. 77.) And then, reading the *Pater* in Greek she suddenly found herself praying. Then she met an Englishman who introduced her to the English Metaphysical poets, and she fell in love with them. She translated George Herbert's *Love* into French. A little earlier she had been taken to Solesmes and spent from Palm Sunday to Maundy Thursday there, and Gregorian chant became as authentic a mode of revelation to her as the lives of Christian martyrs. She finally became a Christian in

everything but membership of the Church of God. She loved to go to Mass, and says once that "my heart was transported—I hope for ever—by the Holy Sacrament exposed on the altar." (Ib., p. 83.) And yet she was never baptized, and died outside the formal communion of the Church.

## II

Before discussing this last point, let us look at some of her beliefs. It will not come as a surprise that, with her life-long ambition to share the sufferings of others, the passion of Christ becomes the centre of her Christian belief. It is, she says, the "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" that is "the real proof that Christianity is something divine." (*P. and G.*, p. 102.) And she is emphatic that "to explain suffering is to console it; therefore it must not be explained". (Ib., p. 103). So that our attitude must be one of total acceptance: "The love of God is pure when joy and suffering inspire an *equal* gratitude." (Ib., p. 72). "Joy is the sweetness of contact with the love of God, and unhappiness is the wound which results from this same contact when it is painful—but it is the contact itself alone that matters, not the form of it." (*A. de D.*, p. 96.) She even says once that "Every time I think of the crucifixion of Christ, I commit the sin of envy." (Ib., p. 89.) "The point of intersection of creation and the Creator . . . is the point of intersection of the branches of the Cross." (Ib., p. 141.)

This emphasis leads sometimes to a strange over-statement of the "nothingness" of man as against the All of God. She says in one of her letters that she is not afraid of the Wrath of God: "By a strange inversement the thought of God's anger only arouses love in me. It is the thought of God's possible favour, of His pity, which causes a kind of fear in me, which makes me tremble." (Ib., p. 107.) Man is, she rightly observes, at the mid-point, and so at the danger-point, of the universe. "God has created a world which is not the best possible but which contains all degrees

of good and evil. We are at the point where it is the worst possible. For beyond that is the degree where evil becomes innocence." (*P. and G.*, p. 92.) But then she goes on to say that " The ' I ' (self) is only the shadow projected by sin and error which block the light of God and which I take for a being. . . ." (Ib., p. 46.) Our very existence, she seems to think at some moments, is a stain upon creation. " May I disappear," she prays, " in order that the things which I see may, from the very fact that they are no longer things seen by me, become perfectly beautiful " ; or " When I am anywhere, I soil the silence of the sky and the earth by my breathing and the beating of my heart." (*P. and G.*, p. 48.) And so we must surrender all, get ourselves out of the way. " We possess nothing in the world—for chance may come and take it all away from us—except the power of saying ' I '. It is that which we must give to God, that is to say, destroy it. There is absolutely no other free act allowed to us except the destruction of the ' I '." (Ib., p. 28.) " Perfect joy excludes even the feeling of joy, for in the soul that is filled with the object there is no corner left capable of saying ' I '." (Ib., p. 35.) Only Grace can assist us. " God can only love Himself, His love for us is love for Himself through us. And so He who gave us being, loves in us the consenting to lose our being.' (Ib., p. 36.) And when we love God it is not a human love of which we are capable : " This love in it (the soul) is divine, uncreated, for it is the love of God for God which passes through it. God alone is capable of loving God." (*A. de D.*, p. 139.) Indeed, inert matter is the best thing for us to contemplate, for it cannot know disobedience : " Matter is entire passivity, and so entire obedience to the will of God. It is for us a perfect model." (Ib., p. 134.) It is for us a humbling thought to ponder on our contingency : " Meditation on the chance meeting of my father and mother is more salutary than meditation on death. Is there any single thing in me which does not originate from this meeting ? Only God. And still, even *my* thought of God has its origin in this meeting."

(*P. and G.*, p. 124.) So we learn our own worthlessness. "Monotony is either the most beautiful or the most terrible thing there is. The most beautiful if it is the reflection of eternity. The most terrible if it is the index of a perpetuity without change. Time superseded or time sterilized. The circle is the symbol for beautiful monotony, the oscillation of a pendulum of terrible monotony. . . . It is when man sees himself like a squirrel turning round and round in a circular cage that, if he does not lie to himself, he is near salvation." (Ib., pp. 204–5.) We must learn that here we have no continuing city. "The city gives the feeling of being 'at home'. We must take this feeling of being "at home" into exile with us. We must dig our roots into the absence of place." ("être enraciné dans l'absence de lieu." (Ib., p. 45.) And this was certainly what she felt to be her own vocation: "I feel," she wrote to Père Perrin, "that it is necessary for me—it is laid down for me—to find myself alone, a stranger and an exile from any human *milieu* without exception." (*A. de D.*, p. 60.)

This leads to a strange isolationism, a purist attitude to all human contracts. True, she has an amazing sense of human sympathy and charity. "If some one has done me a wrong, I must desire that this wrong shall not degrade me, for love of him who inflicts it on me, in order that he may not really have done me any wrong at all." (*P. and G.*, p. 86.) And yet this charity is anxiously qualified: in order never to be pulled down to the level of public opinion she prescribes for herself: "Outside links of brotherhood, to treat men as a spectacle and *never* to look for friendship." (Ib., p. 179.) It was, among other things, her fear of 'the social' in man which, she says, kept her out of the Church. We cannot help feeling that it may be at this point that her deep readings in Eastern mysticism have led to a conception of the pure self, the self that must be unselfed, that she has not learned to christianize.

And yet, what a magnificent grasp she had of the Incarnation! "We are precisely as incapable of unglueing our-

selves from the earth as an earth-worm is. How then, could He, our heavenly Father, come to us without a coming *down*? There is no way of picturing to oneself a relation between God and man so unintelligible as the Incarnation. But the Incarnation smashes this unintelligibility. It is the most concrete possible manner of thinking of this impossible coming down. Why then shouldn't it be true?" (*P. and E.*, p. 113.) And in spite of what might seem, to some, her "syncretistic" outlook she is emphatic that "One must have given all one's attention, all one's faith, all one's love to a particular religion in order to be able to think of each other religion with the highest degree of attention, faith and love which it can admit to." (*A. de E.*, p. 184.) And this leads to a profound appreciation of Christian sacramentalism: "Catholic communion. God did not merely once make Himself flesh, He makes Himself matter every day to give Himself to man and to be consumed by him. Reciprocally, through fatigue, suffering, death, man is made matter and consumed by God. How can we reject this reciprocity?" (*P. and G.*, p. 28.) It is not surprising that she frankly tells Père Perrin, "I love God, Christ and the Catholic faith as much as it belongs to a being as miserably insufficient as I to love them." (*A. de D.*, p. 53.) What, then, finally kept her out of the Church?

## III

This is the most difficult part to grasp: Père Perrin, who knew most about it, discusses it with penetration, delicacy and tact—though not without (one feels) a certain embarrassment in having to present Simone Weil's apologia to his Catholic readers. We have seen that her social puritanism led her to an extreme suspicion of "the social" as such: and the visible Church was to her a social phenomenon. "I am afraid of this patriotism for the Church which exists in Catholic milieux—a patriotism like that for one's country." (Ib., p. 59.) Further, she believed that "the beauty of the world is almost absent from the Christian tradition. . . . It is

a terrible lacuna. How could Christianity have the right to call itself catholic if the universe itself is left outside?" (*A. de D.*, p. 164.) This lack is the worse, because "in all that arouses in us the pure and authentic sense of beauty there is genuinely a presence of God. It is like a kind of incarnation of God in the world, of which beauty is the mark. The beautiful is the experimental proof that the incarnation is possible. Hence, all art of the first order is religious in essence. . . . A gregorian melody is as much a witness as the death of a martyr." (*P. and G.*, p. 173.) But there was more. There was the suspicion that the Roman conception of God as emperor and slave-owner had survived too strongly into the Christian Church ("the Roman conception of God subsists still to-day even in minds like Maritain" (*L'Enr.*, p. 235).) And on the other hand a fear that the Church owed too much to Judaism. She was spiritually anti-semite; though not politically, for she said that political anti-semitism is Jewish in origin! "In spite of their frequent and prolonged contacts with Egypt, the Hebrews remained impermeable to the faith in Osiris, in immortality, in salvation, in the identification of the soul with God through charity. This refusal made possible the putting of Christ to death." (*A. de G.*, p. 230.) But the strongest single reason was the fear of betraying her vocation. "When I think concretely, and as a possible and immediate decision, about the act of entering the Church, no thought gives me so much pain as that of separating myself from the vast and unhappy mass of unbelievers." (Ib., p. 52.) She is terrified, too, that if she once committed herself and then ever failed, in the slightest degree, it would be worse than never committing herself—"The mere thought that I could ever, in case I were baptized with dispositions other than those which are appropriate, then proceed to have, even for one moment, one single interior movement of regret—that thought fills me with horror." (Ib., p. 62.) She is quite clear that "if it were conceivable that one could damn oneself by obeying God and that one could save

oneself by disobeying Him, I should choose obedience just the same." (Ib., p. 52.) And she wonders whether "in these times, when so great a part of mankind is submerged in materialism, God does not will that there should be men and women who have given themselves to Him and to Christ and who yet remain outside the Church." (Ib.)

And so she just left the matter to God. She had always believed that God could declare Himself. "It is not for a soul to believe in the reality of God if God does not reveal this reality. Either that puts the name of God like a ticket on something else—and that is idolatry; or else the belief in God remains abstract and verbal." (Ib., p. 208.) "Religion *qua* source of consolation is an obstacle to genuine faith: in that sense atheism is a purification. I ought to be an atheist with that part of myself which is not made for God. Among men with whom the supernatural part of themselves has not been awakened, the atheists are right and the believers wrong." (*P. and G.*, p. 133.) In the same sense she believes that "If the will of God is that I should enter the Church, He will impose this will upon me at the precise moment that I deserve that He should impose it." (*A. de D.*, p. 51.) How can she enter the Church unless God does will it? And so she remains, as she says she had always remained, "at this precise point, on the threshold of the Church, without budging, motionless, Ἐν ὑπομενῃ (that's a word so much more beautiful than *patientia*!)." (Ib., p. 83.) It is the same kind of self-effacement as is expressed in her last letter to Gustave Thibon, when she left some of her papers for him to do what he chose with: "You tell me that in my note-books there are things . . . that you have never thought of. . . . They belong to you, and I hope that after having undergone a transmutation in you they will emerge one day in one of your works. For it is certainly much better for an idea to link its fortune to yours rather than to mine. . . . I'm not a person with whom it is good to unite one's lot." And to the same friend she wrote, "At this moment I should be much more disposed to die for the Church, if it had need

some fine day for people to die for it, than to enter it. Dying does not commit one to anything, so to speak; it doesn't enclose a lie in it anyway. . . . Now I have the feeling that I am lying whatever I do, whether in staying outside the Church or in entering it. The question to know is which is the smallest lie." (*P. and G.*, p. xxv.) And yet there is a hint of wistfulness in the last remark that she made before leaving France for America. Talking to one of her friends about the possibility of shipwreck or a torpedo (it was in 1942) she said, as her farewell utterance: "Don't you think that the sea would be a lovely baptistery?"[1]

MARTIN JARRETT-KERR, C.R.

[1] qu. Père Perrin, in *A. de D.*, 24.

NOTE.—We learn that Messrs. Routledge Ltd., are hoping to publish an English translation of some of Simone Weil's work shortly. In the meanwhile those who read French are strongly recommended to get *L'Attente de Dieu*, which is one of the most moving books to appear in any country for years. *L'Enracinement*, with which we have not had space to deal, is a more formal sociological study, of great interest and perceptiveness, dealing with man's roots in nature, in society, in biology and geography.

## REVIEW

*Are Workers Human?* By GORDON RATTRAY TAYLOR. Falcon Press. 10s. 6d.

We hear a great deal these days about the need to increase productivity in order to maintain our standard of living; but are apt to forget that the quality of living depends as much upon satisfaction in production as upon satisfaction in consumption, as much upon whether we are happy in our work as upon the quantity of "consumption goods" which we manage to turn out. In his recent book *Are Workers Human?* Mr. Gordon Rattray Taylor suggests that we are, in fact, only likely to achieve maximum output with the resources available if we arrange our affairs in such a way that people are happy in their work.

Among the factors which contribute to the frictions and frustrations which are so common in industry to-day, the workers' lack of confidence in the *intentions* of management is of primary importance. Mr. Taylor suggests that it derives to a large extent from the fact that the primary responsibility of management is to increase the profits of shareholders. The law says so. In practice many firms may seek to pay a reasonable rather than the highest possible return on capital while others initiate profit sharing schemes ; but the workers have no kind of *guarantee* that surpluses will in fact be fairly shared and the old antagonisms remain. The profit-sharing schemes may be withdrawn at any time and tend to lead to a kind of paternalism in which the worker feels that he is being treated as a child rather than as a responsible person. Nationalization may reduce the workers' suspicions of management but creates other problems, and Mr. Taylor does not think its extension to more industries is likely either to increase production or to improve industrial relations.

He welcomes the tendency to limit the return paid on capital, but declares that what is needed is " some dramatic guarantee of the lasting nature and extent of the change." The implication seems to be that the return on capital should be limited by law, which he does not actually propose ; a change that would give the workers a *legal* guarantee that management was working in their interests, and would be unlikely to lead to the paternalism associated with schemes initiated by employers or to the suspicion that the purpose of the change was really to increase the profits of the stockholders. He is concerned not so much with legislative possibilities as with what management could do without waiting for changes in the law.

He makes many suggestions, emphasizing in particular the importance of giving people as much responsibility and security in their work as possible, illustrating his points with many apt examples. He stresses in particular the significance of formal and informal small groups in industry and the value of co-operative labour groups within the factory working for a price instead of a wage ; also the importance of job security, of such guarantees of continued employment being given as circumstances may permit. The average industrialist knows very well how important it is to treat the customer as a person, but is only just beginning to realize how necessary it is to treat the worker as a person too. The right kind of " employee attitudes " are the result of wise " employer attitudes " and policies ; the workers will only think of the firm as " we " if the employer thinks of his

workers as " we ". The whole book should be most valuable to all engaged in industry ; a frank acceptance of the findings of the sociologists about how people actually do behave would, perhaps, do more to increase productivity than all the schemes that may be imposed upon the workers by efficiency experts and time and motion study men.

PAUL DERRICK.

# LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

## *The Civil Service*

Dear Sirs,

C. H. Sisson's letter in the December *Frontier* is worthy of further comment. I want to concentrate on what Mr. Sisson calls Sir John Maud's first point, and summarises as an assertion that " the great bureaucracies . . . can be the instruments of the Divine Will and are only justified in so far as they are so ".

Mr. Sisson questions this assertion and (in an admittedly jocular phrase) sees the danger of confusion between the Divine Will and the policy of His Majesty's Government. To which it can be said (with equal inadequacy) that Sir John Maud errs in good company ! In Romans 13, St. Paul seems to show a like confusion—and the government of his day was that of Nero. The point, in both cases, is, of course, that there is much more in " government " than simply the will of the ruler—whether emperor or cabinet. It is a false abstraction to see Civil Servants as merely the neutral agents of government policy. And this not because officials can subtly transform the policy handed to them, but for more profound and far-reaching reasons.

There is, in effect, a " deposit " of duties which are almost universally accepted as something which any government ought to do. The most fundamental of these is the maintenance of public order, which is the aim of any government worthy of the name (apart from a purely hypothetical " anarchist government "). And public order is, relatively and in its way, a good thing. (Hence St. Paul's support of the Roman Government which with all its defects provided some framework of security within which temporal life could go on.) There are many other public services (e.g. in public hygiene and care for the unfortunate) which governments perform, almost without question.

These functions are the responsibility of government in the sense that any government which permits them to be done badly will come under attack. But it is stretching a legal fiction too far to think of them as the conscious decision of the group of men who make up the government of the day. The cabinet does not sit down and decide " shall we or shall we not have police forces in this country ? "

Mr. Sisson's assertion that " the well-run Department . . . is one as beautifully arranged for carrying out bad policies as good ones ; the Civil Servant, however eminent, is there to carry out orders ", is, therefore, not the whole truth. It has some truth in relation to the Administrative Group in a headquarters office, who are, quite rightly, trained to handle any policy on any subject. But it is no longer true at the lower and local levels of government administration. At these levels, there are a series of specialized organs, intended for clearly defined purposes (of varying usefulness) in society—maintaining civil order, helping people to find jobs, administering insurance, preventing accidents, etc. The officials who man these departments are in many cases specially trained to do these particular things. Their actions are decided mainly by the practical demands of the situation, the job they have been appointed to do, and their professional training and experience. " Government policy " (in the sense of the decisions of the legislature or executive) affect them only remotely and intermittently. Their public responsibility is not mainly " responsibility to obey orders " but " responsibility to do a professional job "—with the quite powerful threat of questions in the House if they fail ! Admittedly, these functions may be extended, wound up, changed or perverted at will of the government, but the organs to carry them out have not quite the neutral character which Mr. Sisson's words suggest.

I do not want, at this point, to appear to make a distinction between the administrative and professional grades to the detriment of the former—because such a distinction would not be valid. The administrative official has just as much a craft to exercise as has the professional officer. The content of his work is more directly influenced by " Government policy "—but his job is distinctive and essential. He has a job to do which cannot be done by anyone else—by politicians or by technical experts. The health of society is influenced by whether it is done well or ill.

What is the Christian concern with all this ? Briefly (to short-circuit a long discussion and to beg many questions !) that whatever other things a Christian may demand of a government, he certainly wants

the ordinary and "bread-and-butter" fruits of sound government; that public order should be maintained, justice done and tyranny avoided. If the Biblical tradition is true, these things are not merely desired by Christians but are God's will for Governments. These are simple aims, shared by many who are not Christian; yet they are not easy to achieve. No government achieves them completely, and there is no government worthy of the name but yields them in some measure. These fruits (or their contrary evils) are the resultant of the *whole* machine of government—politicians, party organizations, judicature, officialdom and all the rest. As Mr. Sisson indicates, a perfect bureaucracy is no defence against an evilly intentioned government; but equally, a well-intentioned government may be frustrated by an incompetent or corrupt bureaucracy. (In practice, of course, most governments and most bureaucracies are a mixture of good and bad!) The Christian is therefore concerned with "political questions"—with "the policy of H.M. Government". He is *also* concerned with the maintenance of a sound and uncorrupt bureaucracy.

My remarks so far are directed to any type of officialdom—and officialdom of some sort is unavoidable in organized society. Is there, however, something different about our "great" bureaucracies—something springing out of the mere fact of size? I think not. Big organizations have their dangers, but there is no simple criterion, Christian or other, which would condemn the modern Civil Service as essentially more diabolical or dangerous than that which existed before 1870. It is sometimes assumed too readily that a large government department, with many officials, represents a greater *concentration* of power and therefore a greater danger of tyranny over the individual. This does not follow. Petty tyranny, as in the days of "bumbledom", is no less tyranny for being "petty"—and may bear harder on the ordinary man by being close to him. The commonest danger of big departments is not irresponsible power so much as diffuse, cumbersome and ineffctive action—which is almost the reverse defect! There is clearly much more to be said here, but I think it can be maintained that, in spite of many defects, dangers and grounds for criticism, there have been real advances in the past century in purity of administration and in the contribution our public services make to human needs. Unfortunately, few of us can remember clearly enough what life was like a hundred years ago to make a comparison!

Mr. Sisson's likening of a great bureaucracy to a mad dog is therefore not quite apt. A truer analogy would be that of a dog which may

conceivably go mad—or may prove to be a useful sheep-dog. It therefore deserves, not to be shot out of hand, but to be watched carefully—and sometimes even encouraged!

W. G. SYMONS.

Dear Sirs,

May an undistinguished civil servant put in a word in defence of Sir John Maud?

Both Mr. Sisson and Dr. Hardy seem to regard the civil service as simply a horribly efficient machine for carrying out decisions reached by Cabinet Ministers. But the truth is not as simple as that. The higher civil servants are themselves partly responsible for Government policy, for they help Ministers to shape it; and there are enormous numbers of junior civil servants whose work is very little affected by changes of Cabinet policy, for their business is not so much to carry out the personal wishes of a Minister as to administer an Act of Parliament in the best interest of the country, which is indeed what Ministers expect them to do. I have heard more than one Cabinet Minister say to his officials: "You cannot ask directions from me on every problem: do what you think right, and if I am challenged in Parliament I will support you (and so will Parliament) if you have acted not arbitrarily but on a sound principle." It is therefore perfectly possible for any civil servant in any situation to ask himself not only what is the wish of Parliament, or the Cabinet, or of various sections of the public, but what is the will of God.

Nor is the Government Machine so powerful as many people outside it seem to imagine. It is not enough for the Cabinet and their advisers at the top of the civil service to agree as to what they think ought to be done: they are limited in one direction by the Courts, in another by Parliament, in another by what the public will stand for. Often and often, because of these very proper limitations, the civil servant has to refuse to take action which is pressed upon him by sectional interests or by propagandists.

My only doubt about Sir John Maud's talk is to wonder whether he has not overstressed the importance of the personal element in administration. If I were to guide my life entirely by the new gospel of personalism which I seem to find in the writings of Berdyaev, Oldham, and others, I should waste time speculating on the private affairs of my

colleagues when I ought really to be giving decisions that hold good irrespective of their private affairs. There is much to be said for an impersonal justice that gives equal treatment to all : such an administration forms a stable foundation on which we can build our freedoms, but a society in which everyone is treated solely as an individual person is a society in which security has disappeared because no one knows what is going to happen next. It is the very impersonality of our systems : e.g. of rationing and taxation that make them instruments of God's will.

J. M. Ross.

Dear Sirs,

As I see it, the difference between Sir John Maud and his two critics is that Sir John believes that the Christian is never really impotent in *any* situation in which he finds himself, whereas Messrs. Sisson and Hardy seem to assume that even the paste on a bureaucrat's desk is so binding that it must prevent a civil servant from applying his creative imagination to his work.

Sir John could, I know, have waxed eloquent about the dangers of bureaucracy, and from the Christian point of view there is indeed a case to be made out against a system of Government which, like our present one, makes it difficult for so many of its officials to feel that they are personally responsible for what they do. Instead of speaking to this subject however, Sir John chose a much more difficult and neglected one, namely " Can the individual bureaucrat in some measure work as a Christian bureaucrat, *now*, instead of postponing any efforts in this direction until the " system " is changed ? "

During the war I acted for a number of years as an advisor to the Board of Trade. From the outset I realized that part of my job was to act as a " cog " in the complicated machinery of a Government Department, and though what is called administration bored me, I am not ashamed to say that I got a certain amount of satisfaction out of my efforts to be an efficient " cog ". But I soon found that much the most important part of my work was, on the one hand, to tell the Government what it ought to be telling the Ministry to do, and on the other, to find out from the trade I was helping to control, what orders we in the Ministry ought in fact to be issuing. Of course all this had to be done through " the appropriate channels ", but in every grade of the service there were bureaucrats prepared to take a risk and make

new channels " appropriate ". That others were chiefly concerned never to get " a bad mark " was also true. But as far as I was able to judge, the civil servant who was content to be just a " cog " was never the one whose promotion was outstandingly rapid.

My first contact with the Legal Department of the Board of Trade gave me the impression that it was staffed by men who would almost run the risk of losing the war, rather than allow the system of judicial procedure they valued to be brought into contempt. In time, however, I saw that even legal punctilio does not necessarily prevent a man from keeping " the human situation " always in mind. I do not know exactly what Mr. Sisson means by a " Christian euphoria ", but it certainly was something very like a Christian hope which kept our administration free from the brutalities which characterized the Hitler regime.

A desperate situation compelled the Government to issue orders which were harsh and arbitrary. Thousands of individuals, each in his own way determined to be responsible for the human situation which his work affected, accepted these orders, and by using his creative ingenuity managed to make them less harsh in their final application than they might so easily have been. I do not believe that by acting in this way, these civil servants failed in their duty as bureaucrats ; on the contrary I am certain that they would have been less efficient even as civil servants if they had accepted, as the whole truth, Mr. Richard Hardy's dictum that " the civil servant is not responsible for the legislation he is delegated to put into effect, nor is he ultimately responsible for the decisions he takes in administering it."

By all means let us change the system. But change *for the better* can only come as the result of efforts in which both heart and brain have co-operated. To encourage such efforts to be made, what could be more practical than Sir John Maud's reminder that the Christian is never really impotent, nor does he ever fight alone !

T. M. HERON.

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